



EDUCATION IN HONG KONG AND ADAPTATION OF CHINESE CHILDREN IN CANADA

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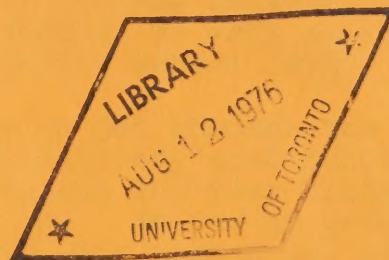


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EDUCATION IN HONG KONG AND
ADAPTATION OF CHINESE CHILDREN IN CANADA

by Pauline Tsui

The schools in Hong Kong reflect the over-populated and competitive characteristics of this British Colony. In Toronto, teacher qualifications are more or less the same, no matter whether it is in North Toronto or the "Inner City". This is not the case in Hong Kong. There are mainly three kinds of schools in Hong Kong: (1) government schools, (2) government-subsidized schools, which are mostly church-sponsored, and (3) private schools, many of which are run for profit. Generally speaking, the first two types of schools have the best qualified teachers, while the private schools vary greatly. Because of the varying standards most parents try to send their children to the best school their children can get into rather than the one closest to home.

Elementary education in Hong Kong takes six years, and secondary education five (Form I to V). If a student intends to go to university, he takes two more years of matriculation courses (Form VI, Upper and Lower). English is usually taught from Grade I on and is considered a very important subject. At the secondary school level, there are two streams. One is called the Anglo-Chinese stream in which English is used as the medium of instruction while Chinese remains as an important subject. The other is called the Vernacular stream, with Chinese as the medium of instruction and English as a very important subject. It is important for teachers here to know that Chinese children come from schools with varying standards as well as the two different streams at the secondary school level.

In order to help the children to get through the Grade I entrance examination into a relatively good school, most parents send their children to the two-year kindergartens, which are privately run. As far as government schools are concerned, the six-year elementary education is free but not compulsory. At the end of the sixth grade, the government gives an examination, selects the more successful students and places them in the

government or government-subsidized secondary schools. The rest of the students have to find their own way into private schools, again through competitive examinations. At the end of Form V, the government gives a school-leaving examination. The majority will pass but only the most successful ones can get into the matriculation courses and later sit for the University Entrance Examination. Pressure to achieve is placed on a child from a very early age. Academic achievement is over-emphasized to the expense of physical, emotional and social development of the child. The teacher-training colleges preach child-centred education, but the schools have to be very realistic. Also, obviously, opportunities go to the better endowed and the more privileged children.

When the Chinese children come over here, they usually like school. They are relieved of the fierce competition. The parents are appreciative of the educational opportunities for their children. The teachers here also like Chinese children because generally they are well-behaved and conscientious. If the children come here young, there is plenty of time to drill the language and basic skills and to develop the child's personality and social relationships. Few of the younger children become a concern to the teachers. If a few of them do, it is often one of two problems, or both: (1) the child is too quiet or even withdrawn and (2) the child makes slow progress in English. There are of course cultural factors, besides personal ones, causing this. The Chinese parents emphasize character development and harmony in social relationships. They want their children to be honest, conscientious, obedient and respectful. Quietness is accepted, if not encouraged. Generally speaking, Chinese parents are not as verbal as Canadians. They do not usually attempt to draw their children out the way Canadian parents do. A withdrawing tendency on the part of the child is seldom recognized as a problem. On the other hand, the Canadian school wants the children to be responsive and involved, to make friends and to be able to participate in a group. When we get a withdrawn child early, there is a lot we can do. In the school, we can place such a child with a compatible teacher, give him small-group experience and provide additional help to build up confidence. Parents need help to see the difference in culture and hence in goals and expectations. Parents also need reassurance that play and fun are good for their children. Recreational programs in the community can also be of much help.

Problems among the Chinese students who come here at the high school level are harder to overcome. If a student is reasonably bright and has had a fair educational opportunity in Hong Kong, he can overcome the language difficulty and make other necessary adaptations. The standard in mathematics and in science subjects is generally higher in Hong Kong. Therefore, many Chinese students tend to do brilliantly in these subjects, but those who had a lesser opportunity in Hong Kong find the obstacles are much harder to overcome. Very often these young people have the ambition but not the academic foundation. They sometimes are not realistic enough to accept the program and grade placement recommended by the school and its auxiliary services. They insist on aiming high and fail at the end; the high schools are not yet able to give adequate help to this type of student.

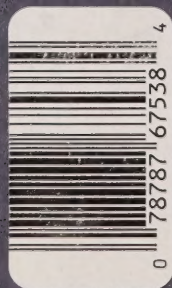
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